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AUTHOR Nedler, Shari
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ABSTRACT

Approximately 5 research studies relating to Project Head Start and reviewed in this document disclose a gap in the knowledge base regarding the effectiveness of various intervention strategies implemented with Mexican American children. A survey of findings indicates that programs have varied from community to community and that only general trends can be identified at the present time. Among the findings are (1) experiments in language programs suggest that children benefit from many kinds of language interventions but that a more structured program is generally more effective than an unstructured one; (2) as measured by tests not sensitized to subpopulation variations, children from low-income families perform below middle-class children in cognitive, intellectual, and achievement behavior; and (3) children of parents having a high level of involvement in Head Start perform better on tests of achievement and development. This review of reported findings has critical implications for future work in the area of early childhood education for the disadvantaged Mexican American child. Major questions remain unanswered regarding characteristics of learner, design and development of replicable instructional programs, training of teachers, and parental involvement and education. A related document is ED 037 778. (JB)

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THE STATUS AND EDUCATIONAL EFFECT OF HEAD START PROGRAMS ON MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

By
Shari Nedler

For
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory
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Shari Nedler

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Austin, Texas

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During the past decade the attention of many professionals in Education, Psychology and Child Development has been directed toward the problems of compensatory education. There has been general acceptance of the idea that intelligence is not fixed or determined at birth, but that much depends on the environment of the child, particularly the kind of intellectual stimulation he receives during his early years. Intervention at an early age appears to be one of the most promising solutions for those children who enter first grade unprepared to cope with the intellectual, social, and emotional demands of our educational system.

Although numerous programs have focused on the development of compensatory programs for the low income Negro American, relatively little attention has been given to those children in our society who enter school speaking a language different from that of the wider community. Accurate census figures are not available at this time. Interpretation of the 1960 census data of five Southwestern states indicates the Spanish-surname population constitutes approximately 12 percent of the total population of the Southwest and 3 to 5 percent of the total national population. Typically, the disadvantaged Mexican American child - urban and migrant - with Spanish as a first language, enters first grade with little knowledge of English. His proficiency in Spanish is often limited as well.

Problems faced by the Mexican American child upon school entry are described by an NEA survey group.

> He (the Spanish-speaking child) suddenly finds himself not only with the pressing need to master an (to him) alien tongue, but also at the same time, to make immediate use of it in order to function as a pupil. His parents, to whom he has always looked for protection and aid, can be of no help at all to him in his perplexity. Moreover, as a result of cultural and economic differences between the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking segments of his community, many of the objects, social relationships and cultural attitudes presented to him in lessons, though perfectly familiar to an Anglo youngster, lie without the Latin American's home experience. Accordingly, the problem of learning English is, for him, enormously increased by his unfamiliarity with what objects and situations the no less unfamiliar words and phrases stand for.

Definition of the Problem

When the school curriculum and expectations for first grade children are based primarily on middle-class, Anglo-American values, the child who comes from a different culture will be at a disadvantage. The majority of these children suffer from socially and economically produced deficiencies which directly affect their ability to profit from educational experiences. Where the language of the home and of the school differ, the problems are multiplied for the child. Compared to more advantaged children, they are severely restricted in language skills and lack the capacity to use language as a tool in conceptualizing, reasoning, and problem solving. The net effects of this language deficiency produces a remarkably consistent pattern characterized by:

1. Initially low I.Q. scores on tests of academic aptitude.
2. Labeling of the child as a retarded or slow learner.
3. Limited intellectual stimulation based on his classification as a "slow learner."
4. An increasing educational deficit which often leads to school dropout, frequently to personality disturbance, emotional

breakdown, delinquency, and other symptoms of social and personal disturbance.

The underlying rationale is that the child's language deprivation is the central handicap from which most of his other deficits derive.

State of the Research

A massive effort to break the self-perpetuating cycle of poverty was launched as a result of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Project Head Start became fully operational in the summer of 1965. A careful survey of research related to Project Head Start discloses an alarming gap in our knowledge base regarding the effectiveness of various intervention strategies implemented with Mexican American children. A review of research and demonstration projects supported by the Research and Evaluation Office of Project Head Start reveals results that are generally inconclusive. A number of problems have been identified in regard to Head Start's research programs. Edith Grotberg reports that:

> Some are essentially conceptual problems, associated with formulating clear ideas and theory and learning to ask the proper questions for research investigation. Others are methodological problems, associated with difficulties in measuring attributes of very young children and programs which deal with them. A third category of research difficulties might be labeled logistical problems, in that ideally planned investigations are often not feasible with "real" children, "real" families, and "real" educational programs. And, finally, in any kind of research there are interpretational problems which stem from the fact that data are not always equivocal, and observations usually permit several alternative interpretations.

A nationwide assessment study of Head Start conducted by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio State University yielded the following general conclusions.

1. Summer programs appeared to be ineffective in producing any gains in cognitive and affective development that persist into the elementary grades.

2. Full year programs appeared to be ineffective in regard to the measures of affective development used in the study, but appear to be somewhat effective in producing gains in cognitive development that could be detected in grades one, two, and three. Programs appeared to be of greater effectiveness for certain subgroups of centers, most notably in all-Negro centers in the Southeastern United States and in scattered programs in the central cities.

3. Head Start children, whether from summer or full-year programs, still appear to be in a disadvantaged position with respect to national norms for the standardized tests of language development and scholastic achievement.

4. Parents of Head Start voiced a strong approval of the program and its influence on their child. There was substantial participation in the activities of the center by parents.

Closer examination of data concerned specifically with Mexican American children in specific programs reveal contradictory results.

Lisa Barclay conducted a study (1967) in which 67 Mexican American children were administered a special seven-week Head Start language training program. Three basic treatments were used. There was also a control group. The three basic treatments involved a structured English language training program. In one group, Spanish was the language of instruction. In a second group, English was the instructional language. In the third, both languages were used. The control group received the usual preschool art and music activities. Tests were administered at the beginning of the program, at the end, and the next spring.

It was found that, (1) the structured language treatments did not produce better scores than the control treatment; (2) the bilingual treatment was not significantly superior to the Spanish or English treatment; (3) since the groups were initially of varying ability, final differences in performance could have been due to this initial difference; and (4) the teacher factor, sex factor, and age factor contributed nothing to the results.

A study conducted by William Parker (1968) investigated the influence of children with American speech and language proficiency on Mexican American children with bilingual language backgrounds. At the end of the six months Head Start program he found significant gains in language as measured by the ITPA. An analysis of sub-test differences led to the conclusion that there was no advantage to be gained from emphasizing the use of Spanish in a mixed class, but that using English in a bilingual class is preferable.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) is supporting a longitudinal study which will examine the effects of three alternate strategies of early intervention designed specifically for Mexican American children (1969). Results have been reported based on the first year of operations.

Three groups, each consisting of sixteen three-year-old children, were involved in a nine month program. Children in Group I (T1), were enrolled in a daily three-hour bilingual preschool program where the children were exposed to carefully sequenced instructional activities. Concepts were introduced initially in Spanish and short periods of English instruction began during the second half of the school year. This curriculum is being developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. The parents of the children enrolled in Group

II, (T2) participated in a parental-community involvement program. The major goal of this program was to raise the intellectual performance of the children through an indirect approach designed to affect the behavior of the parents. Staff members met regularly with the parents and the program focused on providing information related to nutrition, health, education, and available community services. Parents were encouraged to read to their children, to interact with them at home and to use either language. The children in Group III, (T3), attended classes at a Daycare Center for ten hours per day. The major objectives of the Day Care program were to provide an environment where young children could develop at their own rate physically, emotionally, socially, and mentally. Curriculum planning emphasized specific units of interest to preschool children, for the purpose of increasing the child's knowledge of his environment and his community. Units were planned well in advance by the Center Director, who prepared a general outline including objectives and goals. Teachers were then responsible for developing detailed lesson plans. The use of Spanish was encouraged but not required.

A test battery of three instruments was administered in October and May of the school year to each of the three groups.

1. The Leiter International Performance Scale (Arthur Adaptation) - a nonverbal I.Q. test, standardized from the two-year-old level to the adult level was administered.
2. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was given, which provides a measure of the child's receptive language functioning. Form A was administered in English to children in all treatment groups. A Spanish translation

of Form B also was administered to the three groups. Norms have not been established for the Spanish translations.

The evaluation program was intended to permit the testing of several hypotheses regarding children from this socioeconomic strata and ethnic origin. The evaluation also provided for examination of the effects of the various developmental programs and the desirability of modifying the programs in particular respects.

Hypothesis I

Children from educationally deprived homes will score below national norms on standardized instruments which require the use of language in test administration.

Hypothesis II

Children from educationally deprived homes, when tested on standardized instruments which do not require language in the test administration, will score at or approximately at national norms for middle-class children.

Hypothesis III

The Laboratory's planned Early Childhood Education System will raise the intellectual performance level, as measured by standardized instruments, of the impoverished Mexican American child significantly more than will:

a. An indirect intervention in the child's development through the use of a structured Parent Involvement Program, or

b. a direct intervention through a traditional nursery care program, as exemplified by the program of a selected Day Care Center.

Results

All three hypotheses of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

structured Early Childhood Education Learning System were confirmed by the evaluation findings. Educationally deprived children did score below national middle-class norms when tested on standardized instruments requiring language in the test administration. However, they tested at, or approximately at, national norms on standardized instruments which did not require the use of language in the test administration. Finally, the children enrolled in the (T1) Laboratory Early Childhood Program (T.) showed statistically significant gains in I. Q. scores on all test measures, while children in the comparison groups did not. Figure one shows the pretest and posttest scores on the Leiter and on both forms of the Peabody for all three treatment groups.

These findings appear to support the continued use of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory preschool program and its extension, under carefully controlled conditions, to other sites on an experimental basis. The Laboratory has, therefore, extended the program into additional experimental preschool programs for the 1969-70 school year in order to determine whether similar effects can be attained at different sites.

Glen Nimnicht, et. al. (1967) reported on two years of a demonstration program at the New Nursery School. Thirty three- and four-year-old children who were Spanish American and Mexican American participated in the program.

The objectives of the New Nursery School were to, develop a positive self image; to increase sensory and perceptual activity; to improve language ability; to improve problem-solving and concept formation abilities.

The environment of the entire school was organized as an autotelic responsive environment. In a responsive environment the learner is: (1) permitted

to explore freely; (2) informed immediately about the consequences of his actions; (3) free to determine the rate at which events occur; (4) permitted to make full use of his capacity for discovering relations of various kinds.

The teachers as part of the responsive environment responded to the child. The role of the teacher was to facilitate children's learning by encouraging child initiated conversations and activities.

The reported findings indicate that the performance of children who remain in the program for two years is closer to middle-class norms than the performance of children in the program for only one year. Children in the program for one year, however, earn significantly higher scores on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests than comparable children who had not been in the program.

Follow-ups of children revealed that those who had been in the New Nursery School one year only began to level off in their rate of growth during first grade. Findings are not yet available on those children who remained in the program for two years.

Conclusions on the Basis of Given Research

The studies described in the preceding section represent a limited sample selected from currently reported research. A survey of findings indicate that programs have varied from community to community and that only general trends can be identified at the present time. Some of the more significant findings related to Project Head Start have been summarized by Edith Grotberg (1969). This review included an examination of sub-population characteristics.

> Language - The studies in language of impoverished children suggest their language development is generally below that of middle class children. Environmental factors seem to account for a large portion

of the difference; however, ethnicity may account for variations among impoverished sub-populations. . . . The language behavior of the parents is a more reliable predictor of children's language behavior than socioeconomic factors.

Experiments in language programs suggest that children benefit from many kinds of language interventions, but that a more structured program is generally more effective than an unstructured one.

Cognitive, Intellectual, and Achievement Behavior - Children from low income families perform below middle class children in cognitive, intellectual, and achievement behavior. However, careful analyses of test items and use of various tests suggest wide variations in performance of sub-population groups. Use of teacher ratings to assess intelligence of disadvantaged children is limited by teacher biases. More reliable methods seem to be through the development of new tests and the selection of existing tests which are sensitive to sub-population variations.

Parent Participation - Parents generally approve of Head Start and see its value for their children. Their involvement in Head Start ranges from a high degree of enthusiastic participation to a passive indifference with some element of suspicion. However, when parents who wish to participate in the Head Start program are controlled for research purposes, in the amount of participation time, significant differences result. The children of parents who have a high level of participation perform better on tests of achievement and development. In addition, parents who duplicate in the home special learning activities used in the classroom and who are trained in the teaching techniques, enhance the learning of their children more than parents teaching without this duplication or with the learning activities confined to the classroom.

Directions for Future Undertakings

This review of reported findings has critical implications for future work in the area of Early Childhood Education for the disadvantaged Mexican American child. Major questions remain unanswered regarding:

The characteristics of the learner

Design and development of replicable instructional programs

Training of teachers

Parental involvement and education

What are the specific characteristics of the Mexican American child as they relate to his ability to learn?

We must go far beyond identification of cognitive and intellectual competencies and extend our concern to the affective domain. Motivational and social variables are critical facets of the child's environment and must be clearly understood if the instructional program is to be relevant to the needs of the children.

What are the specific characteristics of the programs that are being designed to meet the needs of the target population?

Each program should be based on a rationale supported by scientific data, that sets forth the philosophy and approach. The theoretical framework of the system should be clearly described and the structures within it identified. Designers must be able to specify the model scope which should be congruent with the rationale and theory. The design should identify and provide for the development of each element of the system. Objectives must be specified in behavioral terms and activities developed that will lead to attainment of the objectives. Replication cannot occur unless these programs are fully described.

What provisions can be made for evaluation and assessment of the program as well as the progress being made by each child?

Support must be provided to develop evaluation instruments appropriate for the target population. If programs are to be based and built on the deficits of the children, then accurate assessment becomes a critical factor. Norm referenced tests of greater validity for educationally deprived Mexican American children are a major need. Criterion referenced tests in both Spanish and English (for use in testing success in achieving behavioral objectives) must

be designed for alternate instructional programs.

What kinds of training programs need to be developed in order to prepare teachers to work effectively with preschool Mexican American children?

Teacher training institutions must develop programs which train teachers to achieve specific objectives. This is a relatively new concept in Early Childhood education and if teachers are to be effective in innovation, they must be capable of understanding various program philosophies as well as the detailed objectives that comprise a curriculum. The teacher must not only master an infinite array of techniques, but she must be capable of selecting the appropriate method to meet individual needs.

What are the most effective methods for involving parents in the educational lives of their children?

Before a model for parental involvement and education can evolve, additional information is needed regarding the characteristics of the Mexican American parent as a teacher of his own child. A preliminary study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory reports that a minimal amount of information is transmitted by the mother to the child in a structured teaching situation. Additional research related to child rearing patterns, achievement motivation, and acquisition and performance of academically related behaviors is currently in progress at the Chicago and Arizona research and development projects sponsored by The National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education. The implications of these and other research findings must be incorporated into the work of demonstration projects if a comprehensive model for parental involvement is to become a reality.

If educational institutions are to meet the needs of the Mexican American child a coordinated planning effort is essential. Numerous projects, focusing on various aspects of the problems, have been funded by myriad sources. These include OEO, Title VII, Regional Education Laboratories, USOE supported Research and Development Centers, and the National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education. Effective dissemination of information must become a reality if demonstration and development projects are to apply and utilize fully the knowledge emerging from basic research programs.

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